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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000233

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SUBJECT: SUDAN: GNU PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR VIEWS ON DARFUR

Classified By: USDEL Team Member E. Tariot. Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a two hour discussion with AU mediation advisors, Government of National Unity Presidential Advisor Magzoub laid out a negotiating position at sharp angles with those of both erstwhile Acting Head of Delegation Mohammed Yousuf and SPLM/GNU Darfur point-man Yasir Armin. Magzoub's latest stance, as conveyed to the Deputy Secretary's Special Representative to the Sudan, appears also to be a strategic, and decidedly negative, re-calculation away from Bashir's position asserted to us during recent discussions with Magzoub in Khartoum, and one that could further protract the Darfur Peace Talks if unchecked by AU mediation. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In a January 30 meeting with the Deputy Secretary's Special Representative to the Sudan (D/SpecRep), AU advisors Alex de Waal and Abdul Mohammed (STRICTLY PROTECT) described Presidential Advisor and Chief Government of National Unity (GNU) Negotiator Ahmed Magzoub's articulation of his delegation's negotiating position as one largely unconcerned with international community pressure, and increasingly oriented toward the National Congress Party's domestic constituency. In a private meeting with the AU mediation advisors earlier in the day, Magzoub offered up a blustery but confident political calculation that the crisis in Darfur could be allowed to continue indefinitely without repercussions on the current government in Khartoum. He was dismissive of the international community's concern over the conflict, opining that international pressure has reached its climax. Moreover, he argued, &we've given them the CPA, and they don't want to undermine that⁸ through a hard-line stance on Darfur. The presidential advisor claimed to be undeterred by threat of ICC or UNSC action, and was equally dismissive of any destabilizing factor posed by Chad or Libya. &The Libyans only know how to start trouble, not finish it,⁸ he said.

13. (C) The presidential advisor downplayed the Darfur crisis, national impact, classifying it as &an ache.⁸ Political fallout could be avoided in Khartoum as long as the situation in Darfur remained contained. He claimed that the ongoing peace talks in Abuja were a non-issue for many Sudanese. The conflict was too localized for most to care, and as long as Southerners in government and elsewhere were kept happy, the international community could be kept at bay.

(COMMENT: Our interlocutors stressed that GNU actions against the Darfur diaspora suggest Magzoub's nonchalant attitude contains a degree of posturing. De Waal alleged considerable GNU arm-twisting in response to &out of line⁸ demands at the peace talks. An ongoing Arab-consumer boycott against Zaghawa merchants is proving to be an effective manipulation tactic between Movements, adherents on the ground and the parties in Abuja. END COMMENT.)

14. (C) Magzoub's responses to AU advisors, queries on GNU redlines centered on maintaining the NCP's electoral margin in the North, Khartoum, and East. Paramount in any political agreement signed with the Movements was minimizing the political costs: concessions that either alienated voters or signaled GNU passivity to rebellion in other marginalized areas were unacceptable. To this end, the Movements demand for the vice presidency was moot, and although others within the GNU delegation are inclined to concede the position of Assistant to the President to the Movements, Magzoub personally is against the idea. As for awarding Darfur regional status, Magzoub evinced support, but only if the GNU secured political cover by changing the label, and if the Movements, could be persuaded to further discuss issues related to its administration.

15. (C) The AU advisors stressed Magzoub's repeated return to, and nearly inescapable focus on, the impact of a political settlement on future elections. Key constituencies in North and Central Sudan are NCP's to lose, and political weakness on Darfur must not contribute to that possibility. De Waal and Mohammed posited that President Bashir's coupling of NCP supremacy and Darfur remains uncertain. Our interlocutors opined to D/SpecRep that Magzoub's near-singular focus on this element of the GNU's political negotiating strategy may be of his own doing, vice Bashir's instruction. Magzoub, as NCP secretary-general, is acutely aware of the Darfur Peace Talks impact on the party's powerbase. Although Bashir appears to have given the GNU delegation the order to make a deal, the guidelines are

loose, and the GNU &position8 shifts with each rotating delegation head. Given this, they argued, the presidential advisor,s reappearance at the Talks could protract the peace process for months. Moreover, given the depth of personal support for Magzoub within the party apparatus, should the presidential advisor be able to deliver a pro-NCP peace settlement, Vice President Taha will not be in a position to overrule him -- no matter how cross-wise it is with Taha,s initial signals to the international community. Equally important, Magzoub,s self-professed anti-Western stance makes it evident that, should Khartoum move on a unilateral agreement with one of the Movements brokered by Magzoub alone, the stragglers will be international community,s problem.

16. (C) COMMENT: In a January 31 meeting with D/SpecRep in Abuja, Magzoub,s tough stance was clear. However, it was also evident that he wants to move the Talks forward, in accordance with USG discussions with the GNU held last week in Khartoum. International partners at the Talks have launched an effort to quietly signal to Magzoub that walking back the parties, progress at this stage would be viewed poorly by the international community.

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